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The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/15. It contains replies received from the parties concerned to the notes verbales sent by the Secretary-General pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 25 of the resolution. The report also contains the observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to move the peace process forward with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement. The report covers the period from September 2013 to August 2014.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/15.

2. On 21 August 2014, pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 25 of the above-mentioned resolution, I addressed the following letter to the President of the Security Council:

> "I have the honour to refer to resolution 68/15, which the General Assembly adopted on 26 November 2013, at its sixty-eighth session, under the agenda item 'Question of Palestine'.
>
> "Paragraph 25 of the resolution 'requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts with the parties concerned, and in consultation with the Security Council, towards the attainment of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the promotion of peace in the region and to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session a report on these efforts and on developments on this matter'.
>
> "In order to fulfil my reporting responsibilities under this resolution, I should be grateful if you would kindly convey to me the views of the Security Council by 5 September 2014.
>
> "Recalling the Secretariat's obligation to observe the page limit of its reports, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/214, I would like to encourage the Security Council to limit its submission to 1,500 words."

3. As at 5 September, no response had been received to that request.

4. In a note verbale dated 10 May 2014 to the parties concerned, I sought the positions of the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the State of Palestine, regarding any steps taken by them to implement the relevant provisions of the resolution. As at 31 August 2014, replies had been received from Israel and the State of Palestine.

5. The note verbale dated 4 August 2014 from the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations reads as follows:

> "The State of Palestine reaffirms that the General Assembly resolution 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' constitutes a principal contribution by the international community towards justly and comprehensively resolving the question of Palestine and securing a viable peace. The resolution continues to define the parameters for a solution based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid peace principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.
>
> "This resolution traditionally receives overwhelming support — with 165 votes in favour in the 68th session, underscoring a global consensus in support of a solution that ensures Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem; achievement of the solution of two States: an independent, sovereign, democratic and contiguous State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem the shared capital of the two

States; and a just solution for the Palestine refugees based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) (1948).

"This consensus has been the long-held position of the Palestinian people and leadership, since formal acceptance of the two-State solution in the 1988 Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine. This significant compromise to establish the State of Palestine on only 22 per cent of our historic homeland for the sake of restoring our rights, achieving freedom and ending the conflict is among the boldest reflections of the Palestinian commitment to peace. Remarkably, this commitment has prevailed, despite the historic injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people over the decades since the adoption of partition resolution 181 (II) in 1947 and the tragedy of Al-Nakba of 1948, from which our people continue to suffer to this day, particularly the Palestine refugees, who now number over 5 million people and continue to endure untold hardships, including as a result of successive crises in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, such as the brutal military aggression and humanitarian disaster being inflicted on the Gaza Strip by Israel, the occupying Power, at present, as well as the many crises that have plagued the region, including the current grave conflict in Syria.

"This consensus on the parameters of a two-State solution has also been reaffirmed in numerous other resolutions, including resolution 67/19 (29 November 2012), which accorded to Palestine non-member observer State status, and in declarations by political and regional groups from around the world. In this regard, resolution 67/19, like resolution 68/15, constitutes a serious contribution by the international community towards peace and the State of Palestine's rightful inclusion in the community of nations, pending acceptance of the application for admission to United Nations membership, which remains before the Security Council following submission by President Mahmoud Abbas on 23 September 2011.

"The urgency of salvaging the two-State solution and attaining the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and independence in their State of Palestine — a right explicitly affirmed by the General Assembly — is further reflected in the call in resolution 68/15 for the resumption and acceleration of negotiations in the Middle East peace process towards its stated objectives. It is a call that Palestine has fully respected and actively striven to fulfil in all of its actions, bilaterally, multilaterally and internally. As widely acknowledged, Palestine has consistently upheld its legal obligations and commitments, despite the enormous challenges and manifold crises arising from Israel's 47-year military occupation, and this includes respect for Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and for agreements reached in the peace process.

"Palestine maintains that respect of the law is the key to resolving the conflict, as it would ensure that negotiations to resolve the final status issues — Jerusalem, Palestine refugees, settlements, borders, security, prisoners and water — actually result in achievement of a just, sustainable peace. Regrettably, however, the exemptions from the law that Israel, the occupying Power, has for so long unfairly enjoyed, never being held accountable for its violations of United Nations resolutions and grave breaches, have prolonged and severely compounded the conflict and

repeatedly caused the peace process to fail and undermined the two-State solution.

"Affirming its respect for international law, on 1 April 2014, the Government of the State of Palestine undertook the historic decision to accede to numerous international conventions, underscoring its intention to avail itself of all peaceful, political, legal and non-violent tools in the international system to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to promote the rule of law in Palestine. Those conventions included, inter alia, the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Conventions on the Rights of the Child, on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

"Since the adoption of resolution 68/15, Palestine has also exerted efforts to implement the resolution's provisions and endeavoured to advance conditions amenable for a peace settlement. This has included internal efforts to develop and strengthen national institutions, achieve Palestinian reconciliation, and promote law and order, as well as active engagement, regionally and internationally, in all initiatives aimed at realizing a peaceful solution.

"In specific, from July 2013, the Palestinian leadership engaged in good faith in the negotiations resumed under United States auspices, shepherded by Secretary of State John Kerry, with the support of the other Quartet members of the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, the League of Arab States Ministerial Committee, and concerned States from around the world. The grave impact of this conflict and, inversely, the multitude of benefits that peace would have for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the Middle East region and the international community as a whole are facts widely recognized and propelling these collective efforts.

"For nine months, the Palestinian leadership cooperated fully with these efforts, partaking in multiple rounds of direct negotiations with Israel, the occupying Power. During negotiations, we maintained focus on the goal of peace, mindful of the unsustainability of the status quo and that failed negotiations would entail serious consequences, especially in terms of the diminishing viability of the two-State solution and unstable situation on the ground. Guided by a conviction in international law and the urgency of peace, Palestine committed to negotiations, despite the striking imbalance of power, Israel's bad faith at the negotiating table, the cyclical distractions, complications and hardships caused by its violations against the Palestinian people, and its deliberate impairment of the Palestinian Government's authority and Palestinian unity efforts.

"The Palestinian leadership's commitment to peace was also evidenced in the political restraint exhibited during the July 2013-April 2014 negotiations period, despite constant Israeli provocations. Seeking to foster trust, a decision was made to delay action on rights and privileges gained since the attainment of observer State status. Such restraint was also connected to an agreement for the release of Palestinian prisoners long held captive by Israel, commonly

referred to as "pre-Oslo" prisoners, which Israel had prior agreed to, yet repeatedly reneged on. Significantly, Palestine's engagement in the negotiations was fully supported by the League of Arab States, which remained active in its efforts to promote peace on the basis of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

"Conversely, during the entire nine-month period, Israel constantly flouted the law, ignoring the global calls for an end to the occupation and a peaceful solution to the conflict and preferring to persist with its illegal policies, which it has never ceased during any stage of the peace process, from the 1991 Madrid Conference to the present. Israel's violations included, inter alia, continuation of its illegal settlement campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, including confiscation of Palestinian land, construction of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, and construction of the annexation wall; as well as its military campaign against the Palestinian people, involving all forms of aggression, including air strikes against the Gaza Strip, military raids on civilian areas throughout the West Bank, and excessive force against civilian protesters, causing death and injury to Palestinians, including children; destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure; forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, particularly Bedouin families; daily arrests of Palestinians, resulting in the imprisonment and administrative detention of over 6,000 Palestinians, who are enduring untold abuse and torture at the hands of the occupier; permissive policies aiding and abetting settler terror and violence against Palestinians; the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip in gross collective punishment of the 1.8 million Palestinians there; and innumerable other measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, all in flagrant breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the human rights covenants, relevant United Nations resolutions and the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion (9 July 2004).

"Not only did such unlawful Israeli practices continue in 2014, but most sharply escalated, including, inter alia, settlement activities, with repeated declarations about thousands of new settlement units, and incessant provocations and incitement by Israeli government officials, settlers and extremists, particularly regarding Occupied East Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Israel's rejection of peace peaked after its decision to renege on releasing the fourth tranche of Palestinian prisoners in March 2014 and its decision to unilaterally suspend negotiations in April 2014 in retaliatory response to the reconciliation between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas, leading to a dramatic destabilization of the situation.

"It must be clarified that Palestinian unity is a legitimate, necessary step, long called for by the Palestinian people and by the international community, which has stressed the need for unity for implementation of any peace agreement, with this call for reconciliation reiterated in resolution 68/15. It must also be recognized that, under President Abbas's leadership, reconciliation has been pursued with utmost responsibility — based on clear reaffirmations of the Palestinian national consensus Government's commitment to the agreements reached by the PLO, non-violence and recognition of Israel — and has received the broad support of the international community.

"Yet, Israel has used every cynical tactic to incite against and undermine the Palestinian Government and has chosen once again to intensify its illegal practices, fuelling tensions and thwarting peace efforts. Most shockingly, following the formation of the Palestinian national consensus Government on 2 June 2014, and using the killing of three Israeli settlers in the West Bank on 12 June 2014 as a pretext, Israel launched a wide-scale military campaign against the Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip, the third such violent aggression against the defenceless and besieged civilian population in Gaza in six years.

"As of the writing of this note, the human and physical devastation caused by this aggression against Gaza has been horrific and vast, with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and State terrorism undeniably being perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power. Attacks have been carried out by Israeli missile strikes, artillery bombardment and live fire by air, land and sea. More than 1,700 Palestinians have been killed, including children, women and elderly persons, with children comprising at least a third of the victims. Numerous families have been massacred in their entirety by the occupying forces. In fact, at least 76 families have lost three or more family members, some as high as 20 family members killed, in Israeli military attacks. More than 9,000 people have been wounded, many severely and permanently disabled. More than 460,000 Palestinians have been displaced by the Israeli aggression, including more than a quarter of a million people that have sought refuge in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools. Regrettably, UNRWA schools have also again been targeted by Israeli attacks that have killed and injured innocent civilians and Agency staff who believed they were safe under the United Nations flag.

"The Israeli onslaught on Gaza, which intensified with a ground invasion on 18 July 2014, has also caused the deliberate destruction of over 5,000 homes, damage to over 30,000 other homes and properties, and mass destruction to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, mosques, and water, sanitation and electricity networks. This has deepened the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, already dire due to the illegal Israeli blockade and resultant shortages of food, medical, construction and fuel supplies, and led the Palestinian Government to declare Gaza a 'disaster area'. Despite extraordinary efforts, UNRWA and other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations have been unable to keep pace with the crisis, and, again, the international community is being appealed to for emergency assistance to alleviate the human suffering arising from the vast food insecurity, poverty, displacement, and psychological trauma inflicted on the population and what United Nations officials declared, on 2 August 2014, as a 'health disaster of widespread proportions' with medical services and facilities on the verge of collapse and inadequate water and sanitation posing serious risks of outbreaks of infections and communicable diseases.

"As of the writing of this note, while President Abbas and the Palestinian leadership have been continuously engaged in the regional and international efforts to secure a comprehensive ceasefire and lifting of the eight-year Israeli blockade, and have remained resolutely committed to the objective of peace, Israel has chosen to continue this depraved war against the Palestinian people

under its occupation. Using a preposterous, baseless pretext of 'self-defence', the Israeli Prime Minister and other government and military officials persist in threatening to exact maximum punishment on the Palestinian people and their leadership, and rejecting all calls for an end to the violence and resumption of peace efforts.

"It is not a coincidence that this Israeli aggression was launched amid heightened international pressure on Israel in the peace process; international acceptance of the Palestinian national consensus Government; intense world condemnation of Israeli settlement activities, settler terror, provocations in East Jerusalem, the Gaza blockade and the prisoner crisis; and the growing global calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. It is an obvious repeat of the crises created by Israel in the past to divert attention and evade all efforts to advance a peaceful, just, political solution to the conflict, as it clearly prefers to continue its colonization of the Palestinian land and subjugation of the Palestinian people, only paying lip service to peace as it actively sabotages it and acts with total contempt for the international community.

"We have thus turned again to the United Nations, calling on the Security Council to uphold its Charter duties and act forthwith to stop the slaughter of innocent men, women and children, including by ensuring a permanent ceasefire and providing protection to the Palestinian people, and to shoulder its responsibilities to bring a definitive end to this conflict. While Israel, as the occupying Power, is obligated under international humanitarian law to ensure the safety, well-being and protection of the civilian population under its occupation, it has clearly abdicated this right as it wilfully and wantonly causes harm to the population and is the direct source of their insecurity, suffering and vulnerability. We will also continue our efforts in the General Assembly to comprehensively redress this grave injustice and will continue to demand the implementation of all relevant resolutions. Palestine has also called on Switzerland, Depositary of the Geneva Conventions, to convene a conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, inter alia, to ensure protection for the Palestinian people.

"In conclusion, heeding the calls in resolution 68/15, Palestine reaffirms its readiness to make peace, based on the long-standing parameters and principles of justice and human rights. We reiterate our calls on the international community to uphold legal, political and moral obligations in this regard, recalling the permanent responsibility of the United Nations until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law.

"We are at a critical juncture that will determine whether the solution of two States — the State of Palestine and the State of Israel — living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders will be achieved, or whether that solution will meet its demise under the weight of Israel's illegal policies and entrenchment of its 47-year military occupation. For genuine progress to be made, the precarious reality on the ground and root causes of this conflict must be seriously redressed. Respect for resolution

68/15 and all relevant resolutions would enhance the prospects for realizing peace. If, however, Israel remains intransigent, peace efforts will again fail and we will have to face the failure of the two-State solution and the onset of new collective efforts — political, legal and popular — in pursuit of alternative solutions to end the injustice and realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

"As a last attempt to salvage the two-State solution, the international community must therefore be vigilant in demanding a halt to Israel's illegal practices and demanding compliance with international law. A firm message must be conveyed to Israel that the price of continued occupation will be immense, while there is much to be gained from peace. This message has been conveyed more clearly in the recent period, including by the European Union and other States that have predicated current and future relations with the parties on respect for the law and a commitment to peace, but it must be reinforced with practical actions, including consequences for continued violations and obstruction of peace efforts.

"On its part, the State of Palestine will continue to responsibly cooperate with all international efforts in this regard, based on its conviction in the rule of law and the resolve to achieve a just solution that will achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, and establish Palestinian-Israeli peace, security and coexistence.

"We express appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the entire United Nations system in support of a peaceful solution and in support of Palestinian humanitarian and developmental needs. We also recognize the important role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in raising international awareness and support for Palestinian rights and a just solution, especially in this International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We further reiterate gratitude for the principled support of all concerned States and peoples worldwide, and urge that no effort be spared to achieve long-overdue freedom, justice, peace and dignity for the Palestinian people."

6. The note verbale dated 24 August 2014 from the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations reads as follows:

"As shown in the meeting records, Israel voted against this resolution, as it has done on similar resolutions adopted in the past by the General Assembly. Resolution 68/15 joins the numerous one-sided resolutions passed annually by the General Assembly which only serve to undermine the credibility of the United Nations as an impartial agent for the advancement of peace.

"The State of Israel continuously strives to attain a peaceful settlement of the conflict with the Palestinians and to promote peace in the region. Time and time again Israel has demonstrated to the international community its commitment to finding a long-lasting conclusion of the conflict. Resolution 68/15 overlooks the steps Israel has taken, and continues to take, to end the conflict. Resolution 68/15 fails to examine the situation objectively,

disregarding the role played by the Palestinians in the difficulties in attaining a peaceful resolution to the conflict, in particular Hamas.

"In August 2005, Israel dismantled its settlements and military presence and disengaged from the Gaza Strip. Rather than using this opportunity for development, Hamas took advantage of Israel's absence to launch terror attacks from Gaza onto Israeli citizens. Terror activities escalated further after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2006. Despite Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Hamas has continued to target Israeli civilians with thousands of rockets. Its unprovoked attacks are not the product of efforts to seek redress of legitimate grievances, as some claim. Rather, they are a product of Hamas' guiding ideology. Hamas is a virulently anti-Semitic organization, whose very Charter calls on Muslims to kill Jews. Hamas is not dedicated to improving the plight of Gaza. Instead, its goal is nothing less than the destruction of Israel, no matter the cost to the Palestinian population.

"Since 12 June 2014, the State of Israel has been under constant attack as Hamas launched more than 3,500 rockets at civilian populations in Israeli towns and communities. Israel's south has been the target of bombardment for 14 years, its children constantly subject to indiscriminate attacks from Gaza. The current operation 'Protective Edge' was launched as a last resort to reinstate safety and security to its citizens, following the abduction and murder by Hamas of three Israeli teenagers and the barrage of rockets targeting the Israeli population that has followed undiminished since then.

"Despite the relentless and acute threats to its security, Israel has continued to assert its commitment to achieving a permanent peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Accordingly, the State of Israel has gone to great lengths to extend humanitarian assistance and foster conditions for Palestinian economic growth. Throughout 2013, cooperation intensified with the international community and the Palestinian Authority to facilitate sustainable infrastructural and economic development in Gaza, in order to meet both the short- and long-term needs of the civilian population. Two hundred twenty-seven projects have been approved for implementation, alongside various measures aimed at alleviating Palestinian economic hardships. In 2012-2013, an average of 350 people per day entered Israel from Gaza through the Erez crossing, an increase of 238 per cent since 2009. Permits for longer periods of time are granted for humanitarian cases and businessmen.

"Israel has invested 80 million shekels to expand the Kerem Shalom crossing through which commercial goods are transferred, to accommodate up to 450 trucks daily. All civilian goods are allowed into Gaza with the exception of weapons and 'dual-use' items that can easily be appropriated for terrorist activities. Nevertheless, many restricted items are approved on a regular basis for use in projects funded by the international community and United Nations agencies. Israel continues to supply 125 MW of electricity to Gaza by means of 10 electrical lines, accounting for 63 per cent of the electricity in the Gaza Strip. Israel provides 5 million cubic metres of water per year to Gaza, facilitates the transfer of water equipment and holds water and sewage training sessions for Palestinian professionals.

"The aforementioned steps taken by the State of Israel attest to its commitment to a peaceful resolution to the conflict, yet Hamas has time and

time again chosen to invest in terror, not peace. The State of Israel reiterates its willingness for an agreement according to the principles of the two-State solution and acknowledges the important role played by the Quartet in this matter. Israel calls on the Palestinian Authority to reaffirm its adherence to the achievement of a permanent and comprehensive resolution of the conflict, by engaging in confidence-building measures and bilateral agreements in lieu of unilateral declarative actions in various multinational forums."

II. Observations

7. In July 2013, Israelis and Palestinians resumed direct final status negotiations. The resumption of the peace process, for the first time since October 2010, was supported by extensive facilitation efforts led by the United States of America. In a series of preparatory meetings at the end of July in Washington, D.C., the parties set an agenda which covered all core final status issues and agreed on the goal of achieving a comprehensive settlement within a period of nine months. At the same time, the Palestinians continued to implement an ambitious State-building programme.

8. The first formal round of talks was held on 14 August in Jerusalem, after the release of the first tranche of pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners, in accordance with the agreement for resuming the peace negotiations. On 15 and 16 August, I travelled to Ramallah, Jerusalem and Jordan to lend support to the leaders on both sides embarking on a process towards a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

9. In late 2013, dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians intensified and some 17 rounds of talks were held. The negotiation efforts were, however, complicated by the repeated announcements of settlement expansion with each release of Palestinian prisoners. Israel's settlement announcements in November 2013, moreover, prompted the resignation of a Palestinian negotiator. In spite of these developments, President Abbas confirmed his intention to continue talks.

10. Since the beginning of 2014, negotiation efforts concentrated on crafting an agreed framework on all core issues as the guiding basis for continued negotiations towards a final status agreement. United States Secretary of State John Kerry supported the process by engaging in active shuttle diplomacy between the sides.

11. The international community has been committed to supporting the renewed peace talks, including through the Quartet and key Arab, regional and other stakeholders. Deliberations at the high-level segment of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly focused on advancing the Middle East peace process, with world leaders urging a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Quartet, welcoming the resumption of the peace process, reaffirmed its determination to support the negotiations for achieving a negotiated two-State solution in the prescribed time frame.

12. The United Nations has consistently encouraged the parties to advance the negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement which must be fair and consistent with principles on all core issues outlined in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including land for peace — the road map and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. At the Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle

East, on 20 January 2014, alarmed by the recurrent violence, I reiterated the need to provide support to Israelis and Palestinians to escape the perilous status quo, as the lack of political progress could exacerbate negative trends on the ground.

13. On 28 March 2014, Israel postponed its decision to release the fourth and final tranche of 30 pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners, citing lack of progress in the peace talks. In response, on 1 April, and following the announcement on the same day of 708 reissued tenders for settlement units in Gilo, President Abbas announced that the Palestinian leadership had unanimously voted to join 15 international conventions and treaties. President Abbas, nevertheless, remained committed to continuing negotiations until the agreed date of 29 April. The negotiators continued to meet in order to find a way out of the impasse and to agree to an extension of the negotiation period. On 24 April, Israel suspended the talks in response to the announcement a day earlier of an intra-Palestinian unity agreement for the formation of a national consensus government. Israel stated that it would not negotiate with any Palestinian government backed by Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

14. Following the suspension of talks, negative developments on the ground in mid-2014 have severely hampered the prospects for resuming the peace talks. I have appealed to both Israelis and Palestinians to exercise prudence and avoid unilateral steps that would diminish the prospects for a resumption of negotiations for a final settlement. The United Nations remains committed to supporting the Israelis and the Palestinians in the search for a meaningful path forward in the negotiations for a two-State solution.

15. In April, President Abbas deposited the instruments of accession to 13 international conventions and treaties with the United Nations, and submitted applications for the four Geneva conventions and the Hague conventions of 1907. In May, five of the nine core human rights treaties, plus one of the substantive protocols entered into force, while Switzerland accepted Palestine as a party to the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I (relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts), retroactively to the submission date of its application on 2 April. Accession to these treaties brings new obligations, and the United Nations stands ready to assist the Palestinians, at their request, in the implementation and monitoring of its treaty obligations.

16. On 2 June, President Abbas announced the formation of a Government of national consensus headed by Prime Minister Hamdallah. On the basis of assurances by President Abbas that the Government would continue to abide by the PLO commitments with regard to recognition of Israel, non-violence and adherence to previous agreements, I welcomed the formation of the Government and reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to lend its full support to the Government in its effort to reunite the West Bank and Gaza, in line with the intra-Palestinian unity agreement of 23 April, under one legitimate Palestinian authority, including by addressing the serious political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges in Gaza.

17. On 12 June, three Israeli students were reported missing and were believed to have been abducted in the West Bank, which the Government of Israel blamed on Hamas. The incident led to an escalation of tension in Gaza, characterized by an increase in Israeli air strikes and rockets fired from Gaza at Israel, which undermined the November 2012 ceasefire understanding between Israel and Hamas.

Tensions further increased following the discovery of the bodies of the Israeli students on 30 June.

18. The reporting period witnessed alarming escalations of tension between Gaza and Israel. The fragility of the relative calm was once again demonstrated on a number of occasions throughout the reporting period, with a dangerous ongoing escalation as from 8 July 2014 during the Israel Defense Forces so-called Operation Protective Edge, which had the stated aim of destroying Hamas infrastructure and limiting its capabilities to launch rockets into Israel. The Israel Defense Forces carried out intensified air strikes targeting the facilities and private residences of militants. Palestinian militants fired hundreds of rockets and mortars towards Israel, including its main cities. On 17 July, Israel launched the beginning of ground incursions into Gaza with the objective of destroying the tunnel network of Palestinian militants.

19. As at 26 August, Palestinian militants had reportedly fired more than 4,500 rockets and 1,600 mortars. The Israel Defense Forces had reportedly conducted more than 3,800 air strikes, firing more than 5,900 missiles. The Israeli navy had fired some 3,200 shells, and Israel Defense Forces positioned at the border had fired some 17,000 shells.

20. According to preliminary information, at least 2,104 Palestinians have reportedly been killed. That number includes at least 1,462 civilians, of whom 495 were children and 253 were women. Eleven UNRWA staff members have been killed. Some 66 Israel Defense Forces soldiers, four Israeli civilians, one Israeli whose status remains unclear and one foreign national have reportedly been killed. A few dozen Israeli citizens have been directly injured by rockets or shrapnel.

21. At the peak of the crisis, there were approximately 520,000 internally displaced persons, or nearly 30 per cent of Gaza's population. Approximately 16,700 housing units have been destroyed or severely damaged, affecting some 100,000 Palestinians.

22. The fighting has raised serious questions about respect for the principles of distinction and proportionality in international humanitarian law. Six UNRWA schools harbouring civilians were directly hit by shelling or affected by rocket fire in their immediate vicinity, with serious loss of life and injuries. On 29 July, the premises of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in Gaza were hit by a number of projectiles, which caused damage to the main building and to United Nations vehicles. International humanitarian law clearly requires protection by all parties of civilians and civilian facilities, including United Nations staff and premises. Violations must be subject to accountability and justice.

23. From the onset of the crisis in Gaza, the United Nations has deployed every possible effort, including through my personal engagement, to bring about an end to the violence. I have spoken to Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel and President Abbas of Palestine, calling on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation. I have also engaged with regional and world leaders, including the King of Saudi Arabia, the Emir of Qatar, the President of Egypt, the President of Turkey, the heads of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the United States Secretary of State and the European Union High Representative, in an effort to stop the fighting.

24. It was in this context that I travelled to the region — Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jordan and Saudi Arabia — from 20 to 25 July to support mediation efforts to broker a ceasefire. At every stop of my visit, I carried a three-part message: first, stop the fighting; second, start the dialogue; and third, tackle the root causes of the conflict. I emphasized that we cannot merely return to the status quo ante, but must reach a durable ceasefire that addresses the underlying issues of the conflict: ending rocket fire from Gaza and weapons-smuggling, opening the crossings, lifting the blockade and bringing Gaza back under one Palestinian Government that accepts and adheres to the PLO commitments. These issues were captured by core elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which, unfortunately, remains unimplemented.

25. Part of a solution is a return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. The underlying issues plaguing Gaza stand a far better chance of being resolved if they are part of a comprehensive effort to reunite the Palestinian territory under one legitimate Government. Redeployment of the Palestinian Authority security forces to the crossings in south-eastern Gaza, the so-called Philadelphi Corridor, would be a most useful step that would go a long way towards enabling the full reopening of the crossings.

26. On 31 July, United States Secretary of State Kerry and I jointly announced a humanitarian ceasefire for 72 hours to allow civilians to attend to the necessities of their daily lives so disrupted by the hostilities, in the hope that it could be extended and built upon by the parties to allow negotiations for a durable ceasefire to take place. However, the ceasefire was broken only a few hours after it had started. On 5 August, an Egyptian-brokered 72-hour humanitarian ceasefire went into effect while Israel and Palestinian factions commenced indirect talks through Egyptian mediation in Cairo on a durable ceasefire agreement. The ceasefire was extended three times, on 11, 14 and 18 August. I welcomed the announcement on 26 August of an open-ended ceasefire for Gaza, brokered under Egyptian auspices. The ceasefire was still holding at the time of reporting.

27. With the focus understandably on Gaza, we must not lose sight of the bigger picture. The Gaza escalation, coupled with the tense situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, is a warning of the negative repercussions on the ground when there is no credible political horizon towards a negotiated end to the occupation and settlement of the conflict. The international community must urge and support both parties in returning to meaningful negotiations and restoring prospects for a two-State solution.

28. Tensions and violence in the West Bank continued throughout the reporting period. The Israel Defense Forces conducted 3,124 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in 5,582 Palestinians being arrested. In the occupied Palestinian territory, excluding the so-called Operation Protective Edge, a total of 96 Palestinians were killed, including 58 civilians, and 5,245 Palestinians were injured. Six Israeli civilians and two Israel Defense Forces personnel were killed, and 79 Israeli civilians and 92 Israeli security forces personnel were injured.

29. The increase in settlements is particularly concerning. I have repeatedly stressed that settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. During the reporting period, Israel reportedly announced tenders for the construction of approximately 5,083 residential units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

30. Settler violence remained high. Attacks by settlers resulted in one Palestinian being killed and 155 Palestinians, including 38 children, injured during the reporting period. One Israeli settler was killed and 75 Israeli settlers were injured by Palestinians.

31. The demolitions and evictions that were carried out in Area C of the West Bank are of deep concern and were condemned by the international community. Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime, so as not to resort to the building of unauthorized structures that lead to unjustified demolitions, which often impact the most vulnerable people. During the reporting period, 698 structures were demolished, leading to the displacement of some 1,179 Palestinians, including 624 children. Overall, more needs to be done to ease access and movement throughout the West Bank, including Area C, the Jordan Valley and Gaza.

32. Tension also prevailed in occupied East Jerusalem. Restrictions on access to holy sites in the Old City were imposed on Palestinians, including during the holy month of Ramadan, leading to multiple clashes between worshippers and the Israeli security forces.

33. The abduction and murder of a Palestinian teenager from the Shu'fat neighbourhood on 2 July led to days of violent demonstrations in East Jerusalem. Since July 2014, clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces have spread beyond the traditional hotspots to include Beit Hanina, Shu'fat, Wadi Al-Joz and Jabal Al-Mukaaber.

34. On 24 April, some 90 Palestinian administrative detainees, including several Palestinian Legislative Council members, went on an open-ended hunger strike to protest the Israeli use of administrative detention. They were joined by other Palestinian prisoners in solidarity, including by 5,100 prisoners for one day on 8 May. In late June, the Palestinian detainees suspended their hunger strike after reportedly reaching a preliminary agreement with the Israel Prison Service for the start of negotiations on their demands.

35. There are currently more than 450 Palestinians held under administrative detention, more than twice the number being held in May. I reiterate my long-standing position that administrative detention should be used only in the most limited number of cases, for as short a period as possible, and in exceptional cases. Those detained must either be charged and brought to trial or released without delay.

36. Palestinians continued to advance their State-building programme, albeit limited to the territory under the Authority's control, which excluded Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza. This formed an essential complement to the political process. Despite strong international consensus that the Palestinian Authority was capable of running a State, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee was concerned primarily about fiscal sustainability and economic viability, owing to the Palestinian Authority's fiscal difficulties during the reporting period. The Committee also maintained that concerted action was urgently needed to stabilize the fiscal position of the Palestinian Authority and rekindle private-sector-led economic growth. Efforts by the Palestinian Authority towards structural reforms, including fiscal containment, as well as adequate and predictable assistance to the Palestinian Government by donors, were considered essential to managing the deficit.

37. The full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain fundamental objectives of

the United Nations. Some significant progress was made towards that goal, but much more needs to be done. In this context, $380 million worth of United Nations reconstruction work in Gaza has been approved by the Government of Israel. This has had a positive effect, not only for those receiving services, but also on short-term employment. However, the economic benefits of increased employment will end with the conclusion of the work. Deeper and more fundamental change is therefore required to enable a functioning economy in Gaza, beginning with the authorization of exports to Israel, as well as transfers to and from the West Bank. Without these essential steps, Gaza's future will remain tenuous, at best.

38. I continue to worry about the state of human rights and freedoms in Gaza. Of particular concern are reports of arbitrary detention being carried out by Palestinian security forces and reports of ill-treatment in detention centres in Gaza. I am also deeply concerned about reports of multiple executions without the approval of President Abbas, which is required under Palestinian Basic Law. I call upon the de facto authorities in Gaza to refrain from carrying out further executions. I also urge the Palestinian Authority to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities with full respect for international human rights law.

39. The Palestinian Authority has achieved what it set out to do three years ago, and this must be noted, preserved and built upon. However, I am concerned about the ability of the Palestinian Authority to maintain those gains in the light of its increasingly dire financial situation.

40. I strongly encouraged the Government of Israel to take all measures necessary to facilitate economic growth, including further easing of access and movement within, into and out of the West Bank for both goods and persons. In a positive development, Israel provided a considerable number of permits for Palestinian residents of the West Bank to visit Jerusalem and Israel during Ramadan, and applied more flexible regulations at checkpoints and points of passage during the Holy Month.

41. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Robert H. Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as to the former and current Commissioners-General of UNRWA, Filippo Grandi and Pierre Krähenbühl. I also pay tribute to all United Nations staff, who work under difficult, and at times dangerous, circumstances in the service of the Organization. In particular, we mourn the 11 UNRWA staff members in Gaza who lost their lives both on and off-duty.

42. I started the reporting period with a great sense of hope that, in the light of the ongoing negotiations towards a two-State solution, we could finally bear witness to two States living side by side in peace and security, but I ended the reporting period seriously concerned about the lack of progress and the return to violence between Israel and Palestinian militants. The search for a negotiated solution which would bring Israel and the Palestinians closer to durable peace and security, including the realization of the legitimate aspiration of Palestinians to a State of their own, and of Israel to live within recognized and secure borders, remains elusive. What is important now is for the parties to engage seriously on substance. I call upon Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show vision, courage and determination to reach a historical peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. I remain convinced that direct and meaningful negotiations are the main avenue towards a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution, including an end to

occupation, an end to conflict, and a just and agreed solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees.

43. To this end, it is my sincere hope that the parties pursue vigorously all efforts to sustain an environment that is conducive to the peace process moving forward. In particular, I urge Israel to cease all settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to take concrete steps to further ease the numerous restrictions in place, both in the West Bank and Gaza. I also strongly encourage all Palestinians on the path of non-violence and unity in line with past PLO commitments, and call upon them to pursue their efforts to improve law and order and combat extremism and incitement against Israel, and to continue building strong and democratic institutions that are essential for a viable, independent Palestinian State. In a highly volatile environment, it is crucial that any outbreaks of violence that could undermine political efforts be prevented, and that the parties refrain from provocative steps on the ground. The international community must also play its role by shaping a legitimate and balanced framework that offers a credible political path forward, combined with far-reaching steps on the ground. The international community should understand that its own efforts in pursuit of this goal will increasingly lack credibility if it continues to fail to take the steps necessary to enable an environment conducive to serious engagement.

44. As Secretary-General, I will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel in the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), and in accordance with the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace.